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Mr M Moore
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Moore

Ofsted 2010-11 subject survey inspection programme: English

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and students, during my visit on 25 and 26 May 2010 to look at work in English.

The visit provided valuable information which will contribute to our national evaluation and reporting. Published reports are likely to list the names of the contributing institutions but individual institutions will not be identified in the main text.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included interviews with staff and students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of six lessons.

The overall effectiveness of English is good.

Achievement in English

Achievement in English is good.

- Attainment in English is above average. Although GCSE results dipped last year, the proportion of students obtaining grades A* to C remained above average. Standards in GCSE English Literature were also above average with over 90% of students entered achieving grades A* to C.
- The gap between girls' and boys' attainment widened last year. However, this was not typical as the gender gap had been much smaller than the national picture in the two previous years. Contextual value-added and other data show that boys have made better progress than girls in English in the past three years.
- Students' progress over the past three years has been good. Those with special educational needs and/or disabilities mostly make good progress. Some students who have arrived from Eastern European countries in

recent years have done particularly well in learning English, with several achieving GCSE grades C+ after just a few years' study.

- Progress in lessons observed was good. Students are keen to learn and work well together. Many are confident and articulate and show mature insight into the texts studied.

Quality of teaching in English

The quality of teaching in English is good.

- The department has a potentially strong team of experienced, specialist teachers. They are highly regarded by students. Students speak warmly of teachers who are enthusiastic, make lessons interesting, and provide additional, out-of-school support when needed.
- Teaching observed was good overall and several of the lessons contained outstanding features. Relationships with students are strong and teachers engage them through interactive tasks and stimulating resources. Learning objectives are generally very clear and students have good opportunities for group and pair work. They have a good understanding of the assessment criteria and receive regular opportunities to review the progress they are making.
- In some lessons at Key Stage 3, teachers concentrated too much on preparation for examinations, thus narrowing the range of skills to be taught. While teaching is well focused on students' acquiring particular skills, there are times when too little attention is paid to the broader context or purpose of the work.
- The best assessment practice is of very high quality. Some of the marking is excellent with teachers providing very detailed and helpful feedback. Formal assessments are clearly used to identify areas of weakness and to show performance against National Curriculum levels. As a result, many students are very clear about what they need to do to improve.

Quality of the curriculum in English

The quality of the curriculum in English is good.

- Detailed and helpful schemes of work across both key stages are supported by a good range of materials and teaching ideas. Assessment is integrated well into the schemes. This leads to a consistency of approach across the department.
- An effective intervention programme supports students at danger of underperforming. This includes revision sessions and targeted help for groups of students in the GCSE course. In addition, the department offers paired reading, the Literacy Plus course, and other well-targeted assistance to younger students.
- Enrichment is very good. As well as theatre visits and occasional author visits, the department promotes public speaking very effectively and enters students for writing competitions. There is a reading group and the

department takes a lively and thoughtful part in events like National Poetry Day and Film Week.

- The Key Stage 3 curriculum is currently under review. At present, there is a great deal of emphasis on analytical approaches to texts from Year 7 onwards but fewer opportunities for students to respond in more personal or creative ways. Good use is made of information and communication technology in English, for example through word processing, research and opportunities to make moving image texts. However, the department does not have a systematic approach to promoting students' wider, personal reading. They have too few planned opportunities to develop independent learning skills.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in English

Leadership and management in English are good with outstanding features.

- The department is well led. Clear aims provide a sense of direction to English and consistency of practice shows that policies are well implemented. The head of department models effective teaching and ensures that the department is reflective and evaluative. The team is strong and cohesive, with good potential for further improvement.
- The departmental leaders responded very well to the disappointing 2009 GCSE results. They have identified clearly where students had underperformed and put in place effective strategies to improve achievement. Action planning is detailed and of good quality with well-considered identification of appropriate priority areas. However, although the plans identify the need for further improvements in teaching, especially creative approaches, they do not specify how this will be done.
- The school's self-evaluation in English is accurate and well balanced, making very good use of detailed analysis of performance alongside other evidence.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- reviewing the balance of analytical and personal/creative approaches in schemes of work
- improving the promotion of wider, personal reading by students and opportunities for independent learning at Key Stage 3.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop English in the school.

As I explained previously, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and will be published on the Ofsted website under the URN for your school. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Philip Jarrett
Her Majesty's Inspector